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Patterns of deaths inquired by magistrate in a tertiary care hospital in the Colombo District

Rathnayake KDS¹, Jayasinghe JAB¹, Karunarathne AMJC¹, Madusanka GLC¹, Samudrika KAP¹, Shashinika HGT¹, Vidanapathirana M², Seneviwickrama KLMD^{3*}

¹Faculty of Medical Sciences, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka, ²Department of Forensic Medicine, Faculty of Medical Sciences, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka, ³Department of Community Medicine, Faculty of Medical Sciences, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka.

Background: Suspicious deaths, deaths in custody, or due to medical negligence are inquired by the magistrate. Research into magistrate inquired deaths patterns is meager in Sri Lanka.

Objective: To describe the patterns of deaths inquired by the magistrate reported to the Colombo South Teaching Hospital from 1st of January to 31st of December 2019.

Method: A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among 70 postmortem reports at the judicial medical office of the Colombo South Teaching Hospital. Socio-demographic factors of the victims, causes, and postmortem findings were extracted using a data extraction sheet. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 25.0.

Results: The mean age was 43±15.6 years and the majority were males (72.9%, n=51). Forty one point four percent (n=29) were in the age category of 20-39 years. Suspicious deaths (61.4%, n=43) were the commonest reason for the magistrate inquiries and among those suicidal cases (81.4%, n=35) were the highest. Internal organ damage due to direct injury to the organs (38.6%, n=27) was the commonest mode of death. Highest number of homicides were caused by weapons (57.1%, n=12). The cause of death neither depended on the gender ($\chi^2=1.38$, df=1, p=0.24), nor the age ($\chi^2=2.39$, df=1, p=0.12) of the victims. The age of victims was not significantly associated with -homicidal (Fisher's exact p=0.39) or suicidal deaths ($\chi^2=1.99$, df=1, p=0.16).

Conclusion: The majority of the deaths inquired by the magistrate were suspicious deaths of young adult males who committed suicide.